



**Final Decision Notice and  
Finding of No Significant Impact for  
Albert Pike Recreation Area Project  
Montgomery County, Arkansas**

**Responsible Agency:**  
US Forest Service  
Ouachita National Forest  
Caddo-Womble Ranger Districts

**Responsible Official:**  
Lori Bell  
Acting Forest Supervisor

**For Further Information Contact:**  
Chris Ham  
501-321-5320

**December 2021**

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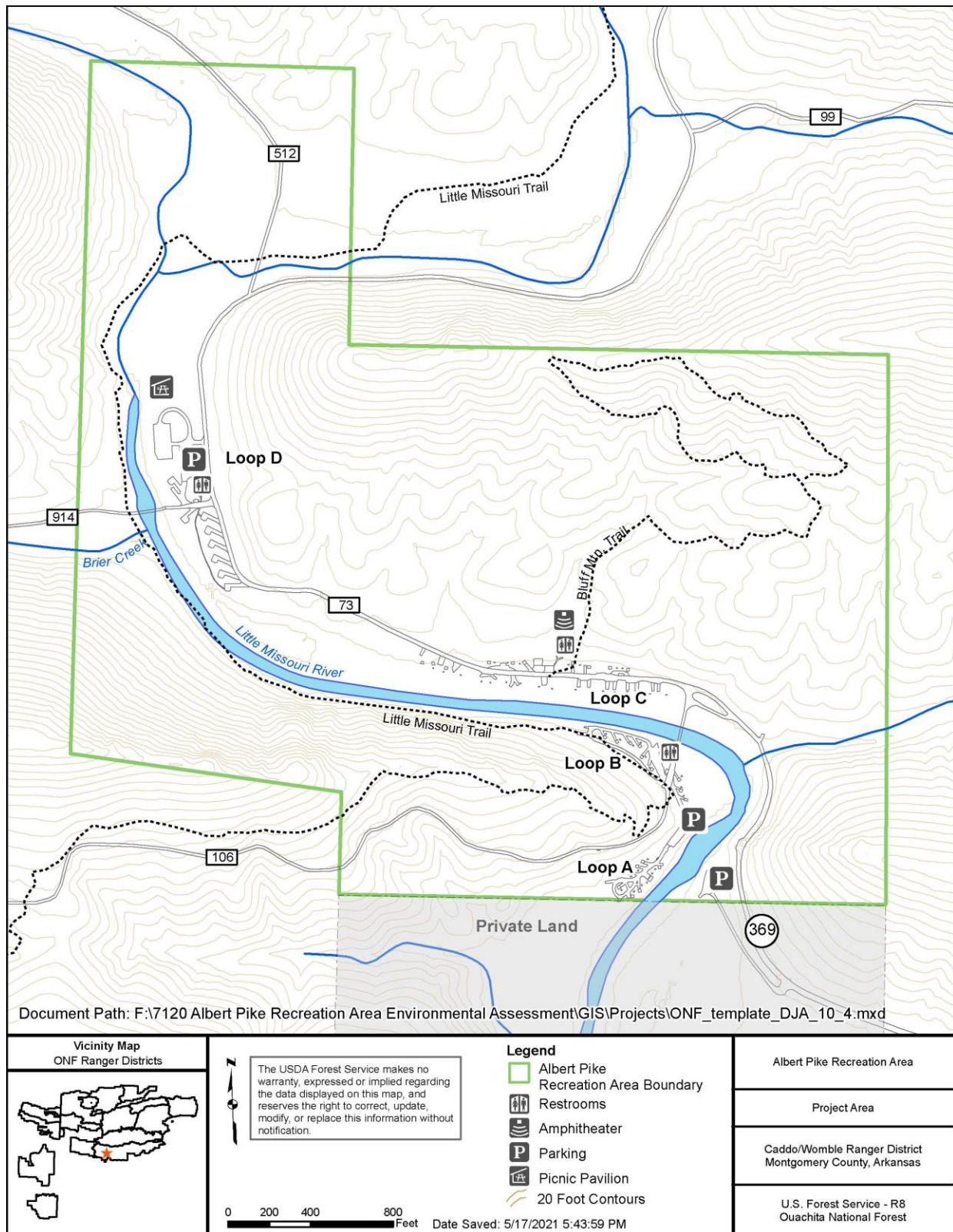
## Decision

Based on the analysis documented in the Albert Pike Recreation Area (APRA) Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action Alternative. My decision is based on a review of the environmental analysis, project record, and public comments received, which includes a thorough review of relevant scientific information and consideration of comments received.

The Ouachita National Forest (ONF) will modify the facilities and infrastructure of APRA (near Langley, Arkansas) to support the recreation area's future uses. Under this decision, Loops A and B will be open to year-round day use and the storage buildings in Loop A will be decommissioned. A Sweet-Smelling Technology (SST) vault toilet will be installed in Loop B, with the loop's bathhouse remaining open seasonally until it is no longer maintainable. At the point that the bathhouse is no longer maintainable, the bathhouse and its well system will be decommissioned. All Loop C facilities and infrastructure will be decommissioned, including the dump station, and allowed to return to natural conditions. Finally, all Loop D facilities and infrastructure will be decommissioned and allowed to return to natural conditions with three exceptions: (1) the large-group picnic pavilion, which will remain intact; (2) the Loop D parking lots, which will be converted to day use parking with natural surfacing; and (3) the construction of an information kiosk near the Loop D parking lots. Road 914 will remain gated and closed for administrative use only.

Contrasts between the desired conditions described in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan) for the ONF and those existing on the ground (current conditions) illustrate the need for action. The purpose of this project is to determine which facilities and infrastructure will support the uses of APRA in the future and to support the following Revised Forest Plan objectives:

1. To maintain all recreation facilities to standard. (Revised Forest Plan, pg. 65)
2. To ensure public health and safety. (Revised Forest Plan, p. 31)
3. To ensure protection of resource values. (Revised Forest Plan, p. 31)
4. To provide visitors with a variety of participation opportunities, activities, and services. (Revised Forest Plan, p. 22)



**Figure 1 Albert Pike Recreation Area Prior to 2010**



## **Reason for the Decision**

The Proposed Action Alternative was chosen over the other alternatives because it best meets the identified purpose and need for this project (EA, page 4). The purpose and need for the action are to improve current conditions within APRA including deteriorating facilities and infrastructure which are incompatible with the desired conditions outlined in the Revised Forest Plan. The Proposed Action Alternative ensures public health and safety and the protection of resource values.

## **Public Involvement**

ONF officials held a virtual collaboration workshop on November 10, 2020, to listen to public input on the desired future condition of APRA. Information gathered during this workshop was considered during the development of the Proposed Action. Over 27 people attended this workshop. Many more likely attended. However, the number of anonymous attendees could not be counted.

A Project Announcement Letter (PAL) or “scoping letter” was released on November 15, 2020, requesting input on the proposed actions regarding changes to the management of APRA. The PAL was also published to the ONF’s website at this time. The public scoping period was open from November 15, 2020, to January 14, 2021. This comment period was extended by 30 days to ensure ample time for the public to provide input on the proposed actions. The APRA Project was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in 2021. In total, 42 comment letters (letters or email messages) were received in response to the scoping letter. The Albert Pike Recreation Area Draft EA was released for public comment on June 7, 2021, and an additional 46 comments were received over this 30-day period. ONF officials held a virtual open house on June 23, 2021, to provide information regarding the alternatives considered in the EA and to answer questions. Over 11 people attended this workshop. More likely attended. However, the number of anonymous attendees could not be counted. On September 12, 2021, a 45-day period was available for members of the public who had commented previously on this project to object to the pending decision (draft Decision Notice). See page 9 of this Final Decision Notice, “Administrative Review and Objection Process,” for more information.

## **Issues Identified**

Issues (cause-effect relationships) serve to highlight potential environmental, social, and economic effects or unintended consequences that may occur as a result of implementing the proposed or selected action. Analysis of issues identified from internal and external sources provides alternate ways to meet the purpose and need for the proposal while reducing adverse effects. Issues also provide a tool for comparing environmental effects of implementing the alternatives and resulting trade-offs for the decision maker and public to understand. Based on a review of internal and external comments, the APRA Interdisciplinary Team identified the following issues relevant to this project that were analyzed in depth.





- Issue 1: Day use only may cause a loss of recreation experience at APRA associated with camping.  
*Method of measurement:* Camping opportunities provided outside of the APRA area.
- Issue 2: Actions such as emergency plans, emergency meeting locations, construction of an administrative building with phone and radio, warning signage on facilities, or construction of a site for a campground host may increase the safety for overnight camping.  
*Method of measurement:* Public safety measures taken.
- Issue 3: Areas above the 100-year floodplain could be constructed and may provide a safer location for overnight camping at APRA.  
*Method of measurement:* Recreation opportunities provided above the 100-year floodplain.

These issues were used to develop two alternatives to the Proposed Action, which are described in Chapter 2 of the EA and summarized on the following page.

## Alternatives Documented in Detail

### Proposed Action (Selected Alternative)

#### Loop A

- Open year-round for day use
- Decommission the storage buildings in Loop A

#### Loop B

- Open year-round for day use
- Loop B bathhouse would be open seasonally
  - a) At the point it is no longer maintainable, it (along with the well system) would be decommissioned
- Install SST vault toilet in Loop B

#### Loop C

- Decommission all facilities and infrastructure and allow to return to natural conditions
- Decommission the dump station

#### Loop D

- Decommission all facilities and infrastructure and allow to return to natural conditions, with the exception of the large-group picnic pavilion, which would remain intact
- Convert parking lots in Loop D to day use parking
  - a) Replace existing pavement with natural surfacing and construct an info kiosk

### Current Management

#### Loop A

- Open seasonally for day use

#### Loop B

- Open seasonally for day use
- Bathhouse open seasonally

#### Loop C

- Loop C and its facilities closed until long-term needs are determined

#### Loop D

- Loop D and its facilities closed until long-term needs are determined



## **New Campground Construction**

### **Loop A**

- Open year-round for day use

### **Loop B**

- Open year-round for day use
- Loop B bathhouse would be open seasonally
  - a) At the point it is no-longer maintainable, it (along with the well system) would be decommissioned
- Install SST vault toilet in Loop B

### **Loop C**

- Develop a new campground for tent camping near Loop C above the 100-year flood elevation, serviced by an SST vault toilet
  - a) Open seasonally or year-round based on customer demand
  - b) Number of camping sites dependent on design criteria and topographic features
- Decommission all existing campsites
  - a) Evaluate parking for new campground development or visitor management at a later date

### **Loop D**

- Decommission all facilities and infrastructure
- Convert parking lots in Loop D to day use parking
  - a) Replace existing pavement with natural surfacing

## **Decommission APRA**

### **Loop A**

- Convert site to an undeveloped condition (remove all structures and other improvements)
  - Forest Plan Amendment would be required (to assign lands to different management areas)

### **Loop B**

- Convert site to an undeveloped condition (remove all structures and other improvements)
  - Forest Plan Amendment would be required (to assign lands to different management areas)

### **Loop C**

- Convert site to an undeveloped condition (remove all structures and other improvements)
  - Forest Plan Amendment would be required (to assign lands to different management areas)

### **Loop D**

- Convert site to an undeveloped condition (remove all structures and other improvements)
  - Forest Plan Amendment would be required (to assign lands to different management areas)

## **Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study**

### **Manage APRA Similar to Pre-flood Condition**

- Loops A and B: Open seasonally for camping; bathhouse open seasonally
- Loops C and D: Open year-round for camping; bathhouses open year-round

Rationale: This alternative is not viable because there is not an effective or reliable means to eliminate the threats of possible future flood events on human lives and property. The developed campsites at APRA are subject to floods of the magnitude that occurred on June 11, 2010, and for these reasons, camping below the 100-year flood elevation was not considered.



## Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action Alternative

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in context to society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action such as the Albert Pike Recreation Area project, significance normally depends upon the localized effects rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact (40 CFR 1508.27).

### Context

The selected Proposed Action alternative is very limited in geographic context (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). Only certain facilities within APRA, located in rural Montgomery County, Arkansas, will be installed or decommissioned. The effects of the biophysical actions are bounded by the extent of the developed recreation area itself.

### Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the ten significance criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and have been considered in my evaluation of *intensity* for this project.

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered, and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). The effects of this project are expected to be within thresholds that historically have not resulted in impacts that, based on experience planning and implementing similar projects, would be considered significant.
2. The degree to which public health and safety may be affected is minimal (EA, pp. 20-23). By implementing this decision to restrict use of the recreation area to the daytime, risks to public safety will be reduced. Based on computed flood water elevations, flash flood hazards to Loop A and B year-round day use occupants will be minimal. Implementing this decision will reduce the risk to public health and safety from infrastructure failure or decline, as well as reduce the potential for contamination of water resources from unmaintained water wells, bathhouses, and septic systems.
3. The project will not adversely affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area (historic or cultural resource, wetlands, and floodplains, etc.). This finding is based on information gathered through records and/or site specific field inventories (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). The project location and description were submitted for review and comment to the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Arkansas Archeological Survey, the Caddo Nation, the Osage Nation, and the Quapaw Nation. Concurrence letters were issued by SHPO March 9, 2021; by the State Archeologist on February 17, 2021; by Osage Nation on April 20, 2021; and by Caddo Nation on April 23, 2021. Decommissioning the bathhouses and dump station poses a risk that excess nutrients are released into the river, other waters, or wetland areas. However, design features specified in the Revised Forest Plan will reduce this risk.
4. The effects of the selected alternative (Proposed Action) on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. While many users desire to see overnight camping within APRA, there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action (Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences).



5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). Managers of the ONF have systematically reviewed all campsites within developed recreation areas that have the potential to flood and have taken similar actions to convert many such sites to day use. Based on computed high-water elevations for flood events, APRA's Loops A and B lie at higher flood elevations than Loops C and D, which are located at or below the 10-year flood elevation.
6. The actions in this decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because similar actions have been implemented many times previously on similar sites across the ONF.
7. The cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed with consideration of past and foreseeable future activities on adjacent public and private land as well as APRA itself, and no significant cumulative effects would result from implementation (Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). The effect of the selected actions are limited to the local area, and there are no other effects that would be additive to those effects.
8. The actions will not affect any sites listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. This determination is based on site specific cultural resource surveys conducted on the analysis area, and consultation on the proposed project with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (EA, p. 27). Concurrence letters were issued by SHPO on Feb. 18, 2013, and March 9, 2021; by the State Archeologist on February 17, 2021; by Osage Nation on April 20, 2021; and by Caddo Nation on April 23, 2021.
9. This project is likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat; however, there are no effects beyond those previously disclosed in the programmatic biological opinion on implementing the final 4(d) rule dated January 5, 2016, signed by Lynn Lewis. Any taking that may occur incidental to this project is not prohibited under the final 4(d) rule (50 CFR §17.40(o)). This project is consistent with the forest plan, the description of the proposed action in the programmatic biological opinion, and activities that do not require special exemption from taking prohibitions applicable to the northern long-eared bat; therefore, the programmatic biological opinion satisfies the Forest Service's responsibilities under ESA section 7(a) (2) relative to the northern long-eared bat for this project.
10. None of the actions will violate federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. All actions are consistent with the Revised Forest Plan. The project will be monitored to ensure that Plan requirements are implemented. If project implementation results in effects greater than anticipated, because of unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented, as appropriate. (EA, p. 5).

After considering the effects of the selected alternative in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that the associated actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

### **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

I have determined that actions included in this decision are consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ouachita National Forest because the Selected Alternative (Proposed Action





Alternative) has been planned and will be implemented in accordance with all applicable design criteria of the Revised Forest Plan.

## **Objection Opportunities**

This decision was subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218. A legal notice of the opportunity to object to the pending decision was published in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* on September 12, 2021. Notice of opportunity to object was provided to those who submitted comments during the project's development. The objection period for this project ended October 27, 2021. No objections were received.

## **Implementation Date**

As per 36 CFR 218.12, since no objection was received, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection filing period.

## **Contact**

For further information contact Chris Ham, Recreation, Planning, Heritage and Wilderness Staff Officer; phone 501-321-5320; email christopher.ham@usda.gov.

## **Responsible Official**

*/s/ Lori Bell*

*December 15, 2021*

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**Lori Bell**  
**Acting Forest Supervisor**

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**DATE**